

Message Text

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ACTION OES-07

INFO OCT-02 NEA-10 ISO-00 CEQ-01 EPA-04 AGRE-00 AID-05

CIAE-00 SOE-02 COME-00 DODE-00 EB-08 INR-07 IO-14

L-03 NSF-02 NSC-05 NSAE-00 PM-05 USIA-15 SS-15

SP-02 DOE-11 INT-05 SMI-01 /123 W

-----128394 250526Z /20

P R 250340Z JAN 78

FM AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6345

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL MADRAS

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 CALCUTTA 0128

EDEPARTMENT PASS SMITHSONIAN-HOLD FOR S.D. RIPLEY

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: SENV, IN

SUBJECT: DATA FOR THE YEAR 2000 STUDY

REF: STATE 2024

1. THIS POST RECEIVED REFTEL AMONG THE CABLES POUCHED TO US BY OUR EMBASSY, AND HAS NOT SEEN ANY OF ITS REFERENCES. ALTHOUGH, WE WERE NOT IN A POSITION TO MAKE A THOROUGH INQUIRY, THE SUBJECT IS CLEARLY AN IMPORTANT ONE IN EASTERN INDIA. WE LEARNED THAT THERE ARE EASTERN REGIONAL FORESTRY OFFICIALS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA LOCATED IN CALCUTTA, BUT AT LEAST IN THE FIRST INSTANCE WE WERE DIRECTED BY THEM TO FORESTRY OFFICIALS OF WEST BENGAL, A CENTRAL AND LRPULOUS BUT NOT TERRITORIALLY EXTENSIVE STATE OF THE REGION.

2. WE WERE NOT ABLE TO CHECK OR CORSS COMPARE CERTAIN FIGURES AND VIEWS THE WEST BENGAL TECHNICIANS OFFERED
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FOR THE STATE AREA. THESE INCLUDE:

A. AREA UNDER FORESTS IN WEST BENGAL IN SQUARE KILOMETERS

YEAR	TOTAL FOREST AREA
1901	13,491
1951	12,225
1974	11,837

B. RIVER	ANNUAL RATE OF SILTATION IN HECTARES PER 100 SQ KM.
TEESTA	98.40
MAYURAKSHI	16.43
PANCHET	10.00
KANGSABATI	3.76

C.	AREAS UNDER SHIFT- PERCENTAGE OF NET TING CULTIVATION SOWN AREA WHERE IN 1000 HECTARE SHIFTING CULTIVA- UNITS TION IS PRACTISED.
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STATE		
ASSAM	498.3	3
MEGHALAYA	416.0	446
MANIPUR	100.00	43
TRIPURA	220.9	9
NAGLAND	608.0	72
MIZORAM	604.0	90
ARUNACHAL	248.6	80
PRADESH		
TOTAL	2,695.7	

D. IN WEST BENGAL APPROXIMATELY 1.7 MILLION HECTARES OF AGRICULTURAL LAND SUFFERS FROM DIFFERENT KINDS OF SOIL EROSION/LAND DETERIORATION, AND APPROXIMATELY 148,000 UNCLASSIFIED

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HECTARES OF BARREN LAND UNDER THE ADMINISTRATION OF FOREST DEPARTMENT REQUIRE REJUVENATION. THE TABLE BELOW GIVES TENTATIVE ESTIMATES OF THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF DETERIORATION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND AND THE AREAS AFFECTED:

TYPE OF DETERIORATION	AREA IN HECTARES
A. WATERLOGGING	500,000
B. SHEET, RILL AND GULLY	600,000
C. FLOOD-PRONE	400,000
D. SALINITY	150,000
E. LANDSLIDES AND LANDSLIPS	16,000
TOTAL	1,666,000

3. THE OFFICIALS WHO ARE WORKING IN THIS FIELD FOR THE STATE, ALSO MADE MORE GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

A. FORESTS IN EASTERN INDIA ARE GRADUALLY BEING DENUDED. ONE OF THE MAIN CAUSES IS ILLEGAL CUTTING OF TREES AND ESPECIALLY SAPLINGS FOR FUEL AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF HOMES BY THE POOR PEOPLE. THIS PROBLEM IS MOST ACURATE IN THE TRIBAL AREAS OF WEST BENGAL. THERE IS AN ACUTE SHORTAGE OF LAND BOTH FOR CULTIVATION AND FOR GRAZING CATTLE, AND INTESNE OVERGRAZING OF FOREST AREAS. THE OVERGRAZING HAS LED TO THE LOSS OF THE POROSITY OF THE SOIL WHICH

HAS RETARDED THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMUS. THIS IN TURN
HAS CAUSED WIDESPREAD SOIL EROSION.

B. THE INDISCRIMINATE CUTTING OF TREES IN THE WATERSHED
AREAS, ESPECIALLY IN HILLY REGIONS, HAS AFFECTED THE
FLOW OF RIVERS AND STREAMS: THE FLOW IS BECOMING MORE
SEASONAL INSTEAD OF BEING RELATIVE CONSTANT THROUGH THE YEAR.
THE DISRUPTION OF THE WATERSHED COVER HAS ALSO CAUSED A
GENERAL LOWERING OF THE GROUND WATER TABLE. THE DOWNSTREAM
EFFECTS OF THIS ARE AN INCREASE IN THE FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY
OF FLOODING DURING THE MONSOON AND A REDUCTION OF THE
WATER FLOW DURING THE DRY SEASON. THIS IN TURN HAS LED
TO A SILTING UP OF NOT ONLY AGRICULTURAL LAND IN THE
FLOOD PLAINS BUT ALSO A SILTING UP OF THE RESERVIORS OF
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RIVER VALLEY PROJECTS AND AN ALARMINGLY HIGH RATE OF
SEDIMENTATION IN THE RIVERS.

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ACTION OES-07

INFO OCT-02 NEA-10 ISO-00 CEQ-01 EPA-04 AGRE-00 AID-05
CIAE-00 SOE-02 COME-00 DODE-00 EB-08 INR-07 IO-14
L-03 NSF-02 NSC-05 NSAE-00 PM-05 USIA-15 SS-15
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FM AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
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AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL MADRAS

UNCLAS SECTION 2 OF 2 CALCUTTA 0128

DEPT PASS SMITHSONIAN HOLD FOR S.D. RIPLEY

C. SLASH AND BURN FARMING IS WIDELY PRACTICED IN MOST

PARTS OF NORTH EASTERN INDIA. THE AREA AFFECTED BY SHIFTING CULTIVATING IS ESTIMATED AT ABOUT 2.7 MILLION HECTARES. (A SIMILAR SYSTEM PREVAILS IN THE HILL FORESTS OF ORISSA AND ANDHRA PRADESH OVER AN AREA OF ABOUT 0.3 MILLION HECTARES.) OWING TO THE GROWING PRESSURE OF POPULATION ON LAND, THE CYCLE OF SLASH AND BURN AGRICULTURE WHICH COVERED A PERIOD OF 20-30 YEARS, NOW OCCURS EVERY 4-6 YEARS. CONSEQUENTLY, DESPITE OFFICIAL ACTIVITIES TO CURB SWIDDEN AND ENCOURAGE SETTLED CULTIVATION, FORESTS ARE BEING DENUDED VERY RAPIDLY AND SOIL EROSION IN THESE AREAS IS INTENSE AND WIDESPREAD. INADEQUATE TERRACING OF AREAS UNDER PERMANENT CULTIVATION IS ALSO A PROBLEM.

D. THE CENTRAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS APPEAR TO BE AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING FORESTS BUT THEY ARE HANDICAPPED BY A SHORTAGE OF FUNDS, TRAINED PERSONNEL AND THE POVERTY OF THE PEOPLE WHO CANNOT
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AFFORD TO BUY FUEL OR SHELTER AND CONSEQUENTLY HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO ENCROACH ON THE FORESTS. IN RECENT YEARS THE GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL FOR DEVELOPMENT OF FOREST HAS INCREASED: IN DOLLAR EQUIVALENTS THE BUDGET FOR 1977 WAS \$1.5 MILLION, WHILE THE ESTIMATED BUDGET FOR 1978 IS \$1.8 MILLION. THE GOWB HAS REPORTEDLY ALSO FINALIZED A \$2.6 MILLION PROGRAM FOR REHABILITATING SOMEWHAT MORE THAN 1000 HECTARES OF DEGRADED FORESTS AND SOMETHING OVER 2,500 HECTARES OF PLANTATIONS. THIS PROGRAM IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN IN IFY 1978 (WHICH BEGINS ON APRIL 1, 1978.)

E. ACCORDING TO OFFICIALS OF THE FORESTRY DEPARTMENT OF THE GOWB, THE PLANS PREPARED BY IT FOR THE PROTECTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORESTS ARE VERY COMPREHENSIVE BUT THERE IS OFTEN A SHORTAGE OF FUNDS AND THE GAP BETWEEN THE PREPARATION OF PLANS AND THEIR EXECUTION IS OFTEN VERY WIDE. SOIL OFFICIALS STRESSED THE LACK OF TRAINED AND EXPERIENCED PERSONNEL, WHICH OFTEN MEANS THAT THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE CANNOT BE PROPERLY USED.

4. IT WAS ALSO MENTIONED THAT SIGNIFICANT AREAS IN NORTH BENGAL (NEIGHBORING NEPAL AND BANGLADESH) ARE ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY CHANGES IN THE COURSE OF THE RIVERS. STATISTICS ARE NOT READILY AVAILABLE ON THE POPULATION OR THE TOTAL AREAS AFFECTED BY THIS PROBLEM, BUT IT IS CONSIDERED SERIOUS. COUNTER MEASURES REQUIRED EXTENSIVE RESEARCH AND PLANNING, INTERSTATE AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND VERY LARGE FINANCIAL

INVESTMENTS, WHICH IT WAS IMPLIED ARE BEYOND ANY CURRENT
CAPACITIES OF THE STATE.

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